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SENATE.....

.....No. 57.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE

TO WHOM WAS REFERRED THE

MEMORIAL OF THE ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY.

1836

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MEMORIAL.

To the Honorable Senate of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The Memorial of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society respectfully represents,

That, although they have been partially heard before the Joint Committee of the Legislature, to whom their recent petition was referred, yet your Memorialists respectfully declare, that the majority of the Committee would not grant them a full hearing of the arguments which they proposed to address to said Committee, but that they were interrupted, when advancing arguments entirely relevant, as they believe, to the subject before the Committee, and thus prevented from presenting their views on subjects of the deepest importance to themselves and the other citizens of this Commonwealth. Your Memorialists would, therefore, most respectfully, protest against the passage of any law for suppressing abolition societies, or declaring the circulation of the publication of abolitionists a penal offence, and against the passage of any resolutions censuring the measures of such societies or of abolitionists generally, believing that it would be a gross invasion of the rights of citizens, either to en-

act penal laws against them, or to censure their principles and measures without allowing them to be heard fully and patiently in their defence.

JOSEPH SOUTHWICK, *President*,
HENRY E. BENSON, *Secretary*.

Boston, March 9, 1836.

IN SENATE, March 10, 1836.

Read, and laid on the table.

IN SENATE, March 11, 1836.

Referred to the Committee on so much of the Governor's Address as relates to Slavery.

Sent down for concurrence.

CHARLES CALHOUN, *Clerk*.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, March 11, 1836.

Concurred.

L. S. CUSHING, *Clerk*.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The Joint Special Committee to whom was referred the Memorial of certain persons, called the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, in which they state that the Committee refused them a full hearing in the premises, ask leave respectfully to submit the following

R E P O R T:

In the progress of their investigation of the matters originally referred to them, and while they were preparing to report to the Legislature, your Committee received, through their chairman, a note from an individual, requesting to be heard before them, on the part of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society; and stating as a reason therefor, that their motives had been misapprehended, and their conduct misjudged. From the very first moment, your Committee entertained the strongest doubt, to express it in no more decisive language, as to the extent of their powers to permit a hearing in this behalf. But being well aware, that their report and the subsequent action of the Legislature thereon, might, in some way or other, affect the interests of the persons requesting to be heard, and remembering that these individuals were our fellow-citizens, under whatever name, ask-

ing a remedy at the source of justice, and entertaining a strong desire to avoid every appearance of expressing an opinion, without a full understanding of the real desires of the persons in question, from their own mouths, your Committee ventured to permit the meeting requested, hoping, that the power which gave them their authority, would, in the end, appreciate their motives and justify their conduct.

Your Committee could not but be aware, that, strictly speaking, the only parties to the papers in their possession, were this Legislature and the Legislatures of the five States, who transmitted the documents, upon which they were deliberating, to our own Executive ; and that the investigation could hardly help assuming something of an *ex-parte* character, when the anti-slavery societies were permitted to appear, with such allegations and evidence as they chose to submit, while the southern planter could not, in the nature of the case, be present, either to reply by argument, or to offer testimony in behalf of his own side of the case. Your Committee, however, ventured to overlook all this, and heard the party upon two several occasions. At both hearings, and particularly the second, your Committee regretted to find, in a portion of the speakers, instead of that modest demeanor becoming citizens in presence of a committee of the Legislature, a vehemence both of language and manner, and an open avowal of their determination to pursue their object at all hazards, which did not tend to conciliate the sentiments of your Committee, and whose purpose seemed to be to arouse feelings already irritable enough upon this highly exciting topic. The Committee suggested to the individuals appearing, that they were permitted to come in merely as a matter of favor and indulgence, and not upon

any ground of right. But, notwithstanding all this, the Committee, by its chairman, was several times called upon to interpose, in order to check irrelevant discussion, and to restrain offensive and improper language. But whatever might have been the intention of these individuals, your Committee certainly listened to many things, upon these occasions, of a nature so indecorous and improper, that they had frequent occasion to regret that the indulgence of a hearing had been granted at all.

The Committee feel this to be the most painful part of their duty, where none has been very agreeable ; and they trust that the Legislature will understand, that the report they make upon this point is intended only as a reason why no further hearing should be granted to the individuals in question. In point of fact, at the first meeting, four persons, appearing on behalf of the anti-slavery society, occupied about two hours and an half in speaking ; at the second meeting, four persons, in part the same, occupied about an equal amount of time ; and your Committee found nothing in the whole argument, to change, in any manner, their previous impressions. Neither have they any reason to believe, that any new view of the subject is likely to be presented. Indeed, your Committee would, on no account, recommend any further hearing upon this question. The large assembly, which attended the second meeting above mentioned, was evidently in a state of much excitement ; and the consequences of another, could only be an increased agitation of the public mind. Your Committee have reason to believe, that at least some of those who appeared before them. desire this above all things ; and the only explanation of the complaint in their memorial against the Committee is, that, either wilfully or from mistaken views, they misun-

derstand the true nature of "*free discussion*," which your Committee, in common with them, consider of inestimable value ; the Committee deeming it to be subject to the well known rules of courtesy, respect for the characters and rights of others, and the observance due to the constituted authorities of the state ; they apparently holding it to be liable to no limitation or restraint whatever. But your Committee have yet to learn, and they trust that the time for such a lesson has not arrived, that it is any part of their business, in the discharge of duties, at best arduous and unpleasant, to find themselves subjected to violent and improper language, without an attempt to preserve that decorum which is due to their own self-respect, and the honor of the Commonwealth.

They report, therefore, that the memorialists have leave to withdraw.

By order of the Committee.

GEORGE LUNT, *Chairman*.

REMONSTRANCE.

*To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of
the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court
assembled.*

The remonstrance of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, and the undersigned citizens of Massachusetts, respectfully represents, that the part of the Governor's message which relates to the subject of abolition, has been referred to a special joint committee of your two bodies, that certain resolutions of several of the slave-holding states, have been referred to the same committee, in which it is recommended to this honorable legislature, to suppress abolition societies by law, and also to pass laws making the circulation of such publications, as are issued by your petitioners—a penal offence. Your petitioners believing that a passage of any such law, as is recommended by the legislatures of the slave-holding states, would not only be a violation of their rights as individual citizens, but a breach of the sacred principles of the constitution of the state, which declare that “the liberty of the press is essential to security of freedom in a state,” and ought not to be restrained, and that the people have a right in an orderly and peaceable manner, to assemble to consult upon the common good—do respect-

fully remonstrate against the enactment of any such law, or the passage of any resolutions, expressing unfavorable opinions of the measures or principles of abolitionists—and fearing that the prevalent misunderstandings and misrepresentations of our sentiments and purposes, may influence the report of the committee, and perhaps the action of the legislature, we respectfully ask that our right to be heard before the committee, may be fully recognized, and we permitted to show why there should be no action of the legislature whatever on the subject.

Boston, March 4, 1836.

JOSEPH SOUTHWICK, *President,*
Mass. A. S. Society,

SAMUEL J. MAY, *Secretary,*
WM. LLOYD GARRISON,
AMOS FARNSWORTH,
DRURY FAIRBANKS,
HENRY GRAFTON CHAPMAN,
SYLVANUS BROWN,
ISAAC KNAPP,
S. E. SEWALL,
ELLIS GRAY LORING.







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